

WALKERS ARE WELCOME C.I.C.



CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2017 - 2018

INTRODUCTION

2017/18 will go down as a year of steady progress, at least on the surface. In reality, it has been a year of significant development and, in some areas major advances have been made.

BUSINESS/ACTION PLAN

When we became a C.I.C, the National Committee produced a Business Plan/Action Plan. Some progress was made but the Committee realised that it needed a different approach for all the plans to be implemented. As a result, our monthly telephone meetings changed to include a section on the Business Plan and outstanding items were progressed. One item in particular, raising the profile and promoting the organisation has made excellent progress and is expanded upon in the Publicity/Marketing section of this report.

SUPPORT TO MEMBER TOWNS

A big part of the job of the National Committee is to help member towns and villages make the most of their accreditation. Some of this work is not very glamorous as it relates to administration and routine but, in the year when new GDPR requirements came into force, a GDPR Policy was prepared and circulated via the website together with an advice sheet so that towns could use this as the basis for their own local GDPR Policy.

The number of Fact Sheets on the website continues to grow, (at the last count it was 20 – Members' Area/Fact Sheets) so if you need advice on a wide range of matters take a look and let us know if there is another subject that might be added.

ANNUAL RETURNS

Last year's Chairman's report contained the following paragraph.

The committee would like to put all towns on notice that the deadlines for ARs and subs will be rigorously enforced in 2018. If ARs and subs. are not received on time, towns will have their membership at least downgraded or even withdrawn. Spending (wasting) time chasing late submissions is preventing the committee taking the organisation forward.

I am very pleased to say that the change in approach worked and the vast majority of towns had their ARs in on time though, sadly we did lose a few towns. Thank you to all those who met the deadline. Let's keep it up.

MENTORING

It's good to report that several people agreed to become Mentors this year and they have had a very positive affect on the support we can give to members. There has also been an improvement in the general communication links between Mentors and their towns. We never have enough Mentors so if you would like to become a Mentor, please get in touch. It is a really satisfying thing to do and you do make friends.

REGIONAL GET-TOGETHERS

Following on from the increase in the number and effectiveness of the Mentors is the establishment of more Regional Get-Togethers. Last year we reported that the National Committee was planning to set up a regional structure for communication and co-operation between towns in the same or

similar locality. There had been a couple of these gatherings but this year we started a pilot scheme in the north, led by Mentor and National Committee member, Randal Metzger. A Northern Regional Get-Together was held in Leeds in March and was a great success. Member towns co-operated in workshops and made it clear they liked the idea of a northern region but it should not add another layer of bureaucracy. The National Committee has taken this on board. The next Northern Regional Get-Together is being planned.

Following the success of the northern region event, a regional Get-Together for Welsh towns was organised. The event was organised by Helen Kenneally, from Chepstow and took place in Knighton, at the Offa's Dyke Path Centre. This too was a lively affair and came to the same decision on bureaucracy. Visit Wales agreed to link up their new "Wales Ways" driving routes with as many WaW towns as possible.

These regional gatherings are very enjoyable and everyone gets a lot from them so why not think about arranging one in your region or at least a smaller cluster meeting?

PUBLICITY/MARKETING

One of the biggest advances in this area has been the redesign of the national website. At last year's Get-Together in Hebden Bridge our Webmaster, Rob Talbot announced his intention to stand down. It took a long time to find a replacement and the way the site is operated has changed. Our new Webmaster is Thomas Coward and he works with the site designer and two assistants, Naomi Wrighton and Jackie Brown. Jackie and Naomi upload the news and events while Thomas has overall control.

Our sincere thanks go to Rob Talbot for the hard work he put into the website over a considerable number of years.

The Facebook and Twitter "magicians" have also done their work behind the scenes and extended our message to a continually widening audience.

The organisation has taken out advertisements in several national and regional magazines.

Newspaper and magazine articles publicising our tenth anniversary and the results of the members' survey have been written and published.

PARTNER ORGANISATIONS

We have concluded a partnership arrangement with Julia Bradbury's website, "The Outdoor Guide" (www.theoutdoorguide.co.uk). As a result, a number of our member towns have posted details of their walks on the site. One of our towns was the first to post a walk suitable for wheelchairs and electric scooters. This is another very useful platform on which we can publicise WaW towns but it is up to all members to participate in order to gain the maximum benefit.

We continue to try to set up closer links with The Ramblers but there is no progress to report other than an article in their magazine.

INTERNATIONAL LINKS

This is an area where considerable growth has been made. At last year's Get-Together we had two speakers from Japan and they were very well received. Following the meeting, three members of the UK WaW organisation, Sam Phillips, Chairman (Ross-on-Wye), Randal Metzger National Committee member (Otley) and Chris Prescott (Bradfield) were invited to visit Japan at the end of October 2018 for two weeks. They have been invited to address three large conventions and to participate in discussions at two others. Sam will speak at the Universities of Tsukuba and Sendai and will deliver the Keynote Speech at the Symposium of the Kumamoto NetworkIn. Additionally, we have received an informal visit from Professor Keiji Maegawa and Professor Yuko Shioji toured a number of Welsh towns gathering information on the specifically Welsh aspects of WaW.

As well as to the Japan visit, Sam will be attending the International Conference of Hiking and Mountain Sports from the 24th to the 26th of January 2019 in Torrent (Valencia, Spain) to deliver a speech describing WaW and the benefits that accrue from membership.

Three of the hosts of the Spanish Conference visited the Bradford-on-Avon Walking Festival and received a very friendly welcome.

All in all, very exciting; who could have foreseen this level of international activity back in 2007?

NATIONAL COMMITTEE

As announced at the 2017 AGM, Sheila Talbot, of Winchcombe stood down from the National Committee and she is sorely missed as Sheila also did the job of "Mentors' Mentor" as, occasionally, Mentors need a word of advice or encouragement. We have been very lucky that Barry Fewster (Baz) from Whitchurch, Shropshire has agreed to join the committee.

Additionally, Randal Metzger and Ken Hawkins have been appointed Directors.

We are always looking for new talent and expertise, so if you think you could help, please get in touch with a Committee member and find out more.

FUTURE

This is always difficult to predict but there are many good reasons to be optimistic about the future of this fantastic organisation. Although progress can be slow there is reason to believe the proposed regional organisation can and will work.

The committee wants to do more to support member towns so please let us know what you would like from the National Committee.

I look forward to groups of towns and villages working co-operatively and, who knows, hitting the headlines.

It would be good to see the organisation spread further into Japan and Spain and maybe elsewhere growing our international reputation.

THANKS

Finally, may I say a big thank-you to the good folks of Cromer for organising such a wonderful Get-Together. Everything has gone like clockwork.

Thanks too are due to Sheila and Rob Talbot who have worked tirelessly on behalf of all of us. Thank-you.

Thank-you too to all the members of the National Committee; Geoff Kitt, our quiet and so efficient Treasurer, Helen Kenneally who worked so hard to organise the the Welsh Get-Together and the tour by Yuko Shioji, Ken Hawkins our Membership Secretary, Randal Metzger, Mentor-in-Chief, northern region, Kate Ashbrook who always puts forward a good word in many ears on our behalf and Baz Fewster, yet to make his mark but watch this space.

Finally, the glue that holds us all together, our Secretary, Ann Sandell. I was on holiday in the USA in August and had found a PC with a wi-fi link so I sent Ann an e-mail. This was at about 7-30 in the evening (12-30am at night in the UK). Within 5 minutes I received a reply!!! I sent Ann to bed with the proverbial flea in her ear. Talk about above and beyond the call of duty!!

Here's to 2019. Best wishes to you all.

Sam Phillips.

Chairman, Walkers are Welcome C. I. C.

October 2018.